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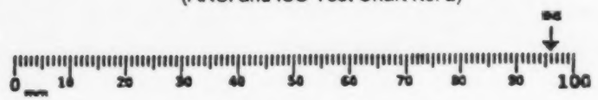

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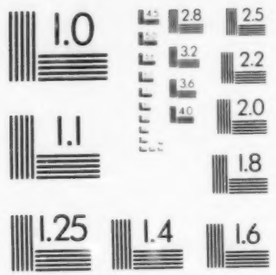

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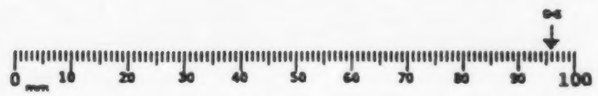

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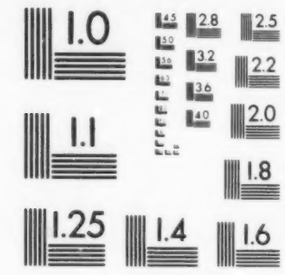

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Extending the

ALBERTA ADVANTAGE

A Discussion Guide

101-05450/

June 2001

Dear Albertan:

Clint Dunford, Minister of Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE), recently established an MLA Committee to review the programs and supports provided by his department to low-income Albertans. The purpose of this review is to ensure that these programs continue to help low-income families meet the challenges they face.

Your feedback is extremely important to us.

As Chair of the committee, I urge you to take the time to read this discussion guide and provide your written input by **August 3, 2001.**

This discussion guide outlines the range of programs currently offered to low-income Albertans and some of the issues surrounding their delivery. At the end of the guide there are some questions you can answer or consider when providing your comments.

In addition to receiving your written responses, the committee will meet with key stakeholders and talk to AHRE clients and staff. The results of this review will be provided to the Minister this fall.

This is your opportunity to tell government how all Albertans can participate in the Alberta Advantage.

The committee looks forward to hearing your ideas and solutions. Thank you.

Thomas A. Lukaszuk, *Chair*
MLA Committee to Review Low-Income Programs

Chair
Thomas A. Lukaszuk,
MLA Edmonton–Castle Downs

Committee Members
Alana DeLong,
MLA Calgary–Bow

Broyce Jacobs,
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Gary Masyk,
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Extending the ALBERTA ADVANTAGE A Discussion Guide: Low-Income Programs Review

INTRODUCTION

Albertans value independence. We prefer to make it on our own, without government support. If we need help we want a hand up, not a handout. But some Albertans don't have enough income for what many of us consider "the basics" — food, shelter, health care, and the needs of their children.

In April, the government announced a review of financial support programs for low-income Albertans. Alberta Human Resources and Employment Minister Clint Dunford has appointed an MLA Committee to review the programs and supports offered by his department.

This discussion guide looks at the challenges faced by low-income Albertans and how government, specifically Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE), responds to those challenges.

This guide describes the programs and supports in AHRE that will be reviewed, and outlines some other programs offered by different departments and other levels of government. It identifies some of the issues facing low-income Albertans and asks for your input.

> Providing a helping hand to those most in need is expected of government.

LISTENING TO ALBERTANS

The MLA Committee leading this review invites written submissions from individuals and organizations throughout the province.

There are questions at the end of this guide and space to write in answers, make comments and provide your suggestions. The committee invites everyone to join the discussion about how Alberta Human Resources and Employment can meet the needs of low-income Albertans.

The MLA Committee will listen to Albertans during this review of support programs.

Over the course of the summer the committee will also gather input through presentations from a cross-section of representative Alberta organizations and from focus groups of clients and staff.

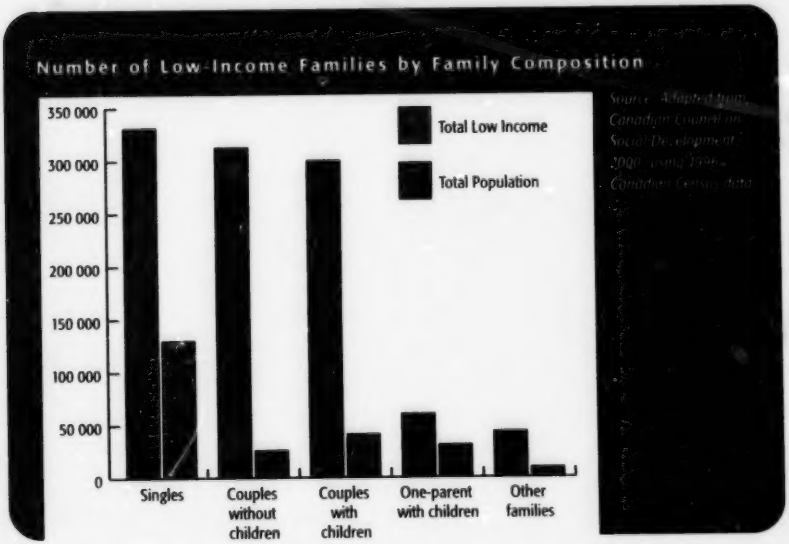
The committee will submit its final recommendations to the Minister of Alberta Human Resources and Employment in the fall of 2001.

LOW-INCOME ALBERTANS

Who are low-income Albertans? What do they need?

There are different methods of determining what people need and what level of support they require. Alberta is preparing to adopt the Market Basket Measure (MBM), which will help determine the income required for a basic but adequate standard of living for Albertans. This standard of living includes access to nutritious food, clothes for work and social occasions, appropriate housing, household needs, personal care, furniture, telephone service, public transportation, reading, recreation, entertainment, and school supplies.

About nine per cent of Albertans had incomes below the MBM threshold in 1996. This dropped to eight per cent in 1997.



Low-income Albertans face many challenges, simply because they don't have enough money. Many can meet a minimal standard of living most of the time, but run into difficulty when the unexpected happens, such as an illness, an increase in rent, or having to find a new daycare.

These are some characteristics of people living in low income based on Statistics Canada's measures:

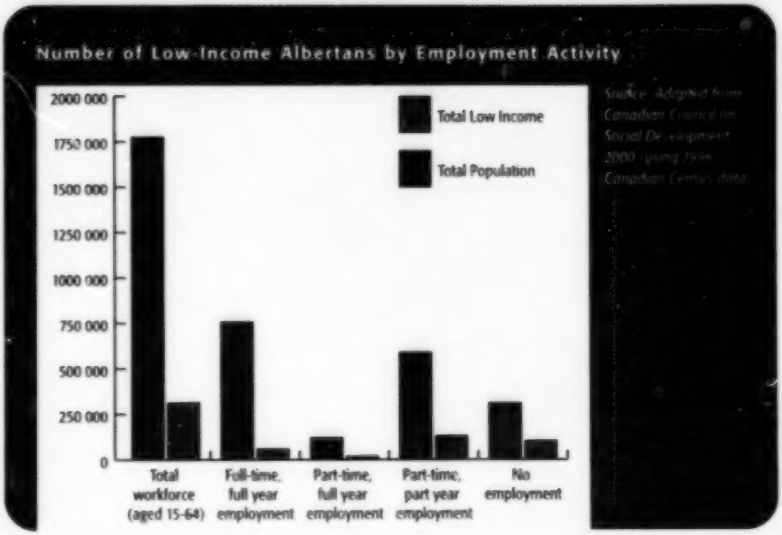
Age—Albertans aged 15 to 24 have the highest likelihood of living in low income, perhaps due to the fact that many young Albertans are still in school, or have difficulty getting full-time jobs.

Family Structure—When it comes to family structure, single Albertans and one-parent families have the highest rates of low income. Couples without children have the lowest rates.

Education—Education influences the likelihood of living in low income. Albertans with more education are less likely to be living on low incomes. However, education alone does not enable Albertans to rise above the low-income threshold.

Sources of Income—The main source of income for two-thirds of Alberta's low-income families and individuals is earnings from employment. The remaining one-third are partly or wholly dependent on payments under Supports for Independence, the Skills Development Program, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped, the Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance or workers' compensation.

Only two per cent of Albertans, approximately 26,800 households, depend on the Supports for Independence program.



Low-income Albertans are more likely to be working part-time and for just part of the year. Only 19 per cent of low-income Albertans have full-time, full-year employment.

Minimum Wage—Between 1992 and 1999, the Alberta government raised the minimum wage from $5 per hour to $5.90 per hour. Fewer than three per cent of working Albertans receive the minimum wage. Of these minimum wage earners, 64 per cent are working part-time, 63 per cent are between 15 and 24 years of age, and 54 per cent have been working for less than a year.

What Alberta Human Resources and Employment is Doing

The programs and supports for low-income Albertans that are administered by Alberta Human Resources and Employment are the focus of the MLA Committee review. Here are some brief descriptions of the support these programs provide for low-income Albertans.

Supports for Independence

When low-income Albertans cannot meet their basic needs on their own and other forms of government support are insufficient, they can turn to Alberta's program of last resort, Supports for Independence (SFI).

SFI provides financial assistance to individuals and families to meet their basic needs, including shelter, food, clothing, utilities, transportation, and school supplies, and provides training and employment programs to help people move into the workforce and be more self-reliant.

SFI also provides premium-free Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan coverage ($68/month for families, $34/month for singles), and covers the costs of essential medical needs including prescription drugs, optical, dental, diabetic supplies and emergency ambulance service for clients and their families. The average medical benefit paid on behalf of each SFI family to medical service providers is $141 per month.

About 40 per cent of clients in the SFI program are either receiving SFI benefits as a supplement to their employment earnings, actively seeking work, or in training and employment programs, which include the following:

Alberta Community Employment—This employment program is designed for SFI and AISH clients who are

having difficulty finding work in the competitive labour market. It provides Albertans with an opportunity to improve their job skills and gain valuable work experience in six-month employment positions with non-profit societies, municipalities, hospitals and schools.

Employment Skills Program—This program provides SFI clients with work experience and training in provincial government departments. Employment positions are up to six months long.

Alberta Job Corps—This is a hands-on employment program designed to provide SFI clients with an opportunity to work and earn a wage while learning employment skills. Through local partnerships, Albertans can access employment instruction, workshop projects, community work projects and work placement opportunities.

The remaining 60 per cent of SFI clients face permanent or temporary barriers to participating in the work force. They receive Assured Support or Transitional Support.

Since 1993, the SFI caseload has fallen substantially, but the rate of decline in the caseload in recent years appears to be slowing. As of April 2001, there were 26,823 cases on SFI. Most were either single individuals or one-parent families.

AHRE Low-Income Support Programs are the focus of the MLA Committee review.

Despite the recent introduction of programs to reduce child poverty such as the Canada Child Tax Benefit, the Alberta Child Health Benefit, and the Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit, families requiring SFI to cover their basic needs include almost 25,000 children.

SFI Benefits (Monthly)

Here are some examples of what someone in the SFI program would receive as monthly payments from a number of sources.

	Single, No children		Single, Two children, Ages 6 and 14		Couple,*** Three children, Ages 2, 7, 12	
	ETW	**AS**	**ETW**	**AS**	**ETW**	**AS**
SFI Base Amount per month*	$ 402/m	$ 615/m	$ 913/m	$ 1044/m	$ 1217/m	$ 1426/m
Federal CCTB+NCBS per month**	$ 0/m	$ 0/m	$ 331/m	$ 331/m	$ 480/m	$ 480/m
SFI School expenses per year	$ 0/y	$ 0/y	$ 275/y	$ 275/y	$ 200/y	$ 200/y
AB Energy rebates per year	$ 300/y	$ 300/y	$ 300/y	$ 300/y	$ 600/y	$ 600/y
GST Credit per year	$ 205/y	$ 205/y	$ 624/y	$ 624/y	$ 731/y	$ 731/y
Total per month	**$ 419/m**	**$632/m**	**$1319/m**	**$ 1450/m**	**$1775/m**	**$ 1984/m**

ETW = Expected to Work; **AS** = Assured Support only

CCTB = Canada Child Tax Benefit; **NCBS** = National Child Benefit Supplement

* Includes Standard Allowance, Shelter Allowance, $5 co-payment for prescription drugs, and $78 Personal Needs Supplement for the Assured Support category.

** CCTB + NCBS—there is an extra $18.25/month per child under the age of 7, if no claims for childcare expenses were made on the previous year's tax return.

*** Assumes both people are either Expected to Work or receiving Assured Support.

- Additional **Supplementary Benefits** are provided based on a variety of needs such as: babysitting and day care; natal allowance; special diet; medical transportation and unforeseeable situations beyond the client's control that pose a serious health risk.
- The **first $115/month** of earned employment income, **plus 25% of the remainder**, for one adult per couple, is not considered as income for the purpose of calculating SFI benefit levels. If clients attend a job-seeking program or work, they can access **subsidized day care**.
- Clients can receive **up to $300/year** for employment related expenses.
- The Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit provides up to $500/year for one child and $1000/year for two or more children based on the previous year's income.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) provides financial and medical benefits for adults with permanent and severe disabilities that impair their capacity to earn a living. As of April 2001, 27,764 Albertans were receiving AISH benefits.

AISH was reviewed and redesigned after public consultation in 1999. The AISH benefit was increased to $850/month plus a $5/month prescription co-payment allowance, from $818 (plus $5), effective October 1, 1999. An asset limit was introduced, allowing up to $100,000 in assets in addition to a home, a car and a second vehicle adapted for a disability.

In order to provide the opportunity for AISH clients to enter the work force, the income exemption level for singles was increased in October 1999 and job training and employment supports were introduced. As well, AISH medical benefits were extended for one year for clients who become ineligible for AISH because of employment earnings. If clients have left because of employment opportunities, they can return to AISH within two years without having to go through the initial application process again.

AISH was reviewed and redesigned after public consultation in 1999.

AISH clients and their families also receive additional medical benefits including coverage for prescription drugs, eyeglasses, eye exams, dental work, emergency ambulance services, diabetic supplies, and premium-free Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan coverage. The average medical benefit paid on behalf of each AISH client to medical service providers is $245/month.

Widows' Pension

The Alberta Widows' Pension currently provides almost 2,400 low-income widows and widowers aged 55 to 64 with an annual shelter benefit for private rental accommodation, mobile homes, or owned homes, and a monthly financial allowance of up to $818/month.

The program also provides premium-free Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan coverage, and health care benefits similar to those provided to Albertans over the age of 65.

The Government of Alberta remains committed to supporting those most in need.

Extended Health Benefits

The Extended Health Benefits plan provides continued medical coverage to AISH clients, and SFI clients in the Assured Support category, who become independent of government support through their own earnings or those of their spouse. The coverage is provided for one year at a time and can be renewed if income falls below a certain level. The medical benefits are the same as those provided to SFI and AISH clients.

Because one of the major barriers to leaving SFI or AISH is the loss of medical benefits, this continued coverage encourages AISH clients and SFI clients in the Assured Support category to seek or accept employment.

Alberta Child Health Benefit

Reducing child poverty is a goal of the National Child Benefit, a co-operative effort between provincial, territorial and federal governments.

One of the provincial programs made possible through the National Child Benefit is the Alberta Child Health Benefit (ACHB) plan. Established in 1998, this plan provides health coverage for children of lower income families who do not already receive a similar benefit from government.

This coverage includes prescription drugs, dental, optical, emergency ambulance services, and essential diabetic supplies. The average medical benefit paid on behalf of each child under this plan to medical service providers is $22/month.

As of April 2001, over 63,500 children were registered with the program. Eligibility is based on the number of children in a family and the family's net income from the previous year. As of July 2000, the ACHB supported families with a net income from the previous year up to these levels:

number of children	family net income
1	$21,214
2	$23,214
3	$25,214
4	$27,214
More than 4	add $2000 for each additional child

Family Maintenance

Family Maintenance helps single parents and blended families receiving SFI, AISH, and subsidized child care, and some students, obtain agreements for child support payments from the child's absent parent. SFI clients are also assisted in obtaining court-ordered child support when this is required. Orders and agreements are enforced through the Maintenance Enforcement Program of Alberta Justice.

The Family Maintenance program places responsibility for a child's financial needs on the child's absent parent, rather than on Alberta taxpayers. More than 7,000 families are assisted by this program each month, on average by $300 per child.

Homeless Shelters

Alberta Human Resources and Employment sets standards and provides funding for shelters to accommodate single men and women who need somewhere to stay. Longer stay shelters are also available for "harder to house" individuals, such as adults suffering from chronic mental illness. Shelter staff offer a variety of services including employment and life skills, and counseling services.

AHRE Training and Employment Programs

The following training and employment programs assist Albertans to enter or re-enter the workforce, and encourage them to work towards independence and self-sufficiency.

Skills Development Program

The Skills Development Program provides adult learners in financial need with grants to learn the skills they need to get a job or as a prerequisite for further study. The program provides students with living allowances and covers the cost of tuition and books.

Basic Foundation Skills—Under the Skills Development Program, disadvantaged Albertans in need of education and training receive help with adult basic education, academic upgrading, university and college entrance preparation, integrated training (including academic upgrading, employability and occupational skills), skills training and English as a Second Language. Employment Insurance recipients, SFI recipients and other unemployed Albertans are eligible for assistance.

Self Employment Program

The Self Employment Program assists eligible unemployed Albertans in creating jobs for themselves by starting a business. The program provides instruction in business plan development, one-on-one business counseling, coaching, guidance and follow-up. Albertans receiving EI or SFI may be eligible for grant assistance for living expenses while taking part in the program.

Youth Connections

Through 34 sites across the province, the Youth Connections program provides unemployed and underemployed Alberta youth aged 16-24 with career planning and counseling services, access to labour market information, assistance in connecting with learning and work opportunities and access to workplace programs.

Summer Temporary Employment

Albertans aged 15-24 can take part in the Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP) during the summer months, gaining valuable work experience with community-based organizations and provincial government departments.

There are a number of employment and training initiatives available to low-income Albertans.

Training on the Job

This program helps Albertans learn job skills and gain experience in jobs that are in high demand in the labour market. Albertans work for up to one year and employers are reimbursed for the job training provided.

Skills for Work

The Skills for Work program provides Albertans with life management, occupational training and basic skills upgrading. This is achieved through work experience targeted to high-demand occupations.

Job Placement Services

The Job Placement Services program matches the employability skills of unemployed Albertans with employers who need to fill jobs. Other services include job search skills, job retention skills, and follow-up support.

Training and employment programs assist Albertans to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Career and Employment Assistance Services

This program helps Albertans prepare for the workforce and find and maintain work by making informed career decisions, understanding the labour market, developing realistic employment plans, and learning effective job search skills. This service is available to any Albertan who is changing employment.

Labour Market Development Programs

Through an agreement with the Federal Government, AHRE assists eligible Employment Insurance (EI) clients (EI recipients, clients who received EI benefits within the last three years, or clients who received EI maternity or parental benefits within the last five years) to access an array of labour market programs and services. These include: Career and Employment Assistance Services, the Skills Development Program, the Self-Employment Program, Training on the Job and Skills for Work.

Government Supports and Programs

Alberta Human Resources and Employment

Supports for Independence (SFI) provides assistance to low-income Albertans who have difficulty meeting their basic needs

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) provides financial and medical supports for adults with permanent and severe disabilities

Widows' Pension Program provides financial, shelter and medical benefits to low-income widows and widowers aged 55-64

Extended Health Benefits for working parents and individuals leaving AISH and SFI Assured Support

Alberta Child Health Benefit for children of low-income working parents

Family Maintenance Program assists single parents and blended families to obtain an agreement or court order for child support

Homeless Shelters to accommodate single men and women who need somewhere to stay

Training and Employment Programs help Albertans enter or re-enter the workforce

Other Government Programs

In addition to Alberta Human Resources and Employment, a number of other provincial government departments offer programs for low-income Albertans, including Finance, Health and Wellness, Seniors, Children's Services, Justice, Community Development and Learning. These programs include:

Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan Premium Subsidy

An Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan (AHCIP) premium subsidy program is available to low-income Albertans.

The program provides five levels of subsidy ranging from 20 per cent to a full subsidy. The AHCIP premium is also waived for individuals who are experiencing hardship and whose financial situation has changed since the previous tax year.

Alberta Blue Cross Non-Group Health Plan

Limited supplementary health benefits are available to individual Albertans at group rates. This plan partially addresses the lack of supplementary employee health benefits that many low-income Albertans face. The premiums are based on what the government pays for group insurance for its own employees. Two significant costs for families not covered under this plan are regular dental care and eyeglasses.

Shelters

Short and longer-term shelters for adults and children who are leaving abusive relationships receive funding support throughout Alberta. The agencies responsible for operating the shelters also raise funds through charitable donations. In addition to providing food, shelters also offer a range of crisis counseling, advocacy, children's programs and referrals to other supports and service agencies.

Social Housing

Social housing provides subsidized housing for low-income families, wheelchair users, and seniors who cannot afford private sector accommodation. Assistance is provided through projects owned by the Province, or by supplementing rent in private sector buildings. Eligibility is based on need, as determined by income, assets, and current housing condition.

The Alberta government also provides funding for community-based emergency housing and support services initiatives.

Seniors Programs

The Alberta Seniors Benefit provides a cash benefit and/or a full or partial Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan premium subsidy to eligible seniors. The Alberta Seniors Benefit is income tested to ensure the greatest benefit is available to those most in need.

Seniors are also eligible for premium-free Alberta Blue Cross Non-Group coverage, as well as partial coverage for dental services and eyeglasses under the Alberta Health and Wellness Extended Health Benefits plan. These programs are not income tested.

Low-income seniors who are experiencing extra financial hardship are eligible for an additional lump-sum cash payment through Special Needs Assistance for Seniors, a last resort program that is income tested.

The Government of Alberta provides a number of programs for low-income seniors to improve their quality of life.

Seniors Housing

Low-income seniors are supported through the Senior Citizens' Self-Contained Housing program and Senior Citizen Lodge Program. The Self-Contained Housing program provides apartment accommodation for individuals and couples who cannot afford private sector

accommodation. The Lodge Program provides affordable housing, meals, housekeeping and life enrichment activities to functionally independent seniors.

Alberta Aids to Daily Living

This program assists Albertans who have a chronic disability or illness, and those who are terminally ill, to receive basic medical equipment and supplies so they can continue to function in a home or home-like setting. Alberta Aids to Daily Living provides services to about 69,000 Albertans each year.

Along with AHRE, several government departments provide support programs for low-income Albertans.

Handicapped Children's Services

Handicapped Children's Services provides support to families with a child who has a disability in order to assist with the extraordinary demands resulting from that disability. The goal is to keep a child with his or her family, or to maintain family involvement if the child needs out-of-home placement, and to facilitate the child's development and participation in the community.

Child Care Subsidy Program

This program subsidizes the child care costs of low-income Alberta families for pre-school children who attend a licensed day care centre or approved family day home. The subsidy amount varies depending on net family income, family size and the number of hours of child care needed each month.

Child Financial Support

Children who are living with a caregiver because their parents are unable to take care of them may receive financial assistance, which is sent to the caregiver. The caregiver's income and assets are not a consideration for eligibility.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities

This program assists adults with developmental disabilities to live, work and participate in the community.

Financial Assistance for Students

Alberta has several programs to address the financial needs of post-secondary students. Financial assistance in the form of scholarships, bursaries, loans and loan relief is provided to students in need who are pursuing post-secondary training and education programs.

Roughly half of Alberta's full-time post-secondary students receive some form of student assistance.

Energy Cost Protection Programs

In the fall of 2000, the Alberta government introduced several programs to help offset higher costs of energy. Residential consumers are receiving a $40 rebate on their electrical bills from January to December 2001. They also received a $150 rebate on their natural gas bills for each of the first four months of 2001. All Albertans over the age of 16 years received a $300 Energy Tax Refund in two $150 installments.

From December 2000 to April 2001, all low-income Albertans meeting the asset and income limits of the SFI program could apply for Emergency Utilities Arrears Assistance. If they had accrued utility arrears and received a disconnection notice, the cost of arrears plus any reconnection costs to a maximum of $1000 were paid on a one-time basis.

These payments were not considered as income for the purposes of calculating benefits in AHRE support programs.

In the 2001 Spring Session, the Alberta government introduced continued energy cost protection legislation.

Tax Policy

The Alberta tax advantage includes a single rate tax, the highest basic exemptions in the country including the highest spousal credit, no provincial sales tax and the Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit, which provides up to $500/year for one child, and $1000/year for two or more children based on the previous year's income.

Federal and Municipal Government Supports

Federal and municipal governments both commit significant funds to low-income Albertans. Federal spending is primarily focused on income support programs such as Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement, Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance and the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB).

The National Child Benefit (NCB) is a joint initiative of federal, provincial and territorial governments to reduce child poverty and encourage families to participate in the workforce. As a result of the NCB, the federal government has increased CCTB payments to children living in low-income families. To complement these changes, five provincial governments have restructured their programs to provide a separate child benefit outside their welfare system, extending assistance to parents who are working. Alberta's primary focus through the NCB has been the development of the Alberta Child Health Benefit.

The federal government also provides a GST credit determined by the previous year's income.

Based on local priorities and resources, municipalities provide supports and services to low-income Albertans such as social housing, out-of-school care, transit fare subsidies, and access to services such as summer camps, libraries and museums.

Government Supports and Programs

Alberta Health and Wellness	Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan Premium Subsidy Alberta Aids to Daily Living Alberta Blue Cross Non-group Health Plan Extended Health Benefits
Alberta Seniors	**Alberta Seniors Benefit** **Special Needs Assistance** **Rent Supplement** **Social Housing**
Alberta Justice	Enforcement of AHRE Family Maintenance Program
Alberta Finance	**Tax Policy** **Alberta Family Employment Tax Credit**
Alberta Community Development	Persons with Developmental Disabilities
Alberta Learning	**Student Finance Board**
Alberta Children's Services	Child Financial Support Child Care Subsidy Program Handicapped Children's Services
Municipal Government Programs	**Social Housing** **Out of School Care** **Access to Services (i.e. libraries, museums, summer camps)** **Transit Fare Subsidies**
Federal Government Programs	National Child Benefit Supplement Canada Child Tax Benefit GST Credit Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement Canada Pension Plan Employment Insurance

Finding Solutions

A broad range of programs and supports are provided for low-income Albertans. The MLA Committee is focusing on those offered by Alberta Human Resources and Employment to determine whether they continue to meet today's challenges.

The Government of Alberta has a responsibility to be fiscally accountable and responsible for taxpayers' dollars.

How can Alberta Human Resources and Employment best help low-income families meet their shelter needs? Rental costs are rising because of several factors, including a strong economy that attracts large numbers of people to Alberta from other provinces and around the world. In many communities, apartments are being converted to condominiums.

When housing and utility costs exceed their budget, low-income Albertans divert money from food or clothing to shelter. They then have less money to spend on their other needs.

How can Alberta Human Resources and Employment best help low-income families meet the costs of raising their children? Low-income families with children find it difficult to provide for the costs of raising a child. In a one-parent family, or if both parents are working, the family needs affordable, good quality child care. Even with school-aged children, low-income families can have difficulty coping with a new school year and the expenses involved, or the costs associated with field trips or extra-curricular activities.

How can Alberta Human Resources and Employment best help low-income families meet the costs of their medical needs? Low-income families may find it difficult to cover the cost of prescriptions, glasses, dental care and unforeseen medical expenses. When these expenses are combined with lower incomes, some face extreme financial hardship.

How can Alberta Human Resources and Employment best help people enter or re-enter the work force? The essential philosophy of the Supports for Independence program is to encourage employment. A number of aspects of SFI can be examined including the level of benefits, earnings exemptions and the challenges of the transition to employment.

The bottom line is that some low-income Albertans face many challenges simply because they don't have sufficient financial resources.

Now It's Your Turn

This guide has touched on some of the challenges of providing support to low-income Albertans.

First we discussed how Albertans value their independence, and outlined the framework for this review.

We identified some of the characteristics of low-income Albertans and noted that the incidence of low income is associated with age, education levels, and family structure.

We saw that most low-income Albertans are working. About 26,800 households in Alberta are receiving SFI, with 40 per cent of them either in job training or working at income levels insufficient to meet their basic needs.

Then we examined Alberta Human Resources and Employment's programs and how they benefit low-income Albertans. We provided information about low-income programs in other departments and levels of government.

Now is the time for discussion with you and other Albertans. Alberta Human Resources and Employment is committed to supporting those most in need. It also has a responsibility to be fiscally accountable and responsible for taxpayer dollars. The MLA Committee looks forward to your thoughts and ideas about how AHRE can achieve both these goals.

For more information on programs and supports for low-income Albertans, visit the Alberta Human Resources and Employment web site at:

http://www.gov.ab.ca/hre/

Questionnaire

The MLA Committee to Review Low-Income Programs invites the comments of all Albertans.

A key question is how to best support low-income individuals and their families in meeting the challenges they face entering the 21st century.

You may wish to complete this questionnaire or use the questions as a framework to complete your written submission.

If you need more space to answer the questions, please attach a separate sheet.

1. **Please rate how important each of the following Alberta Human Resources and Employment (AHRE) support programs are in helping low-income Albertans meet the challenges they face.**

	IMPORTANCE				
	Not at All	A Little	Somewhat	Very	Don't Know
Supports for Independence	1	2	3	4	5
Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped	1	2	3	4	5
Widows' Pension	1	2	3	4	5
Extended Health Benefits	1	2	3	4	5
Alberta Child Health Benefit	1	2	3	4	5
Family Maintenance	1	2	3	4	5
Homeless Shelters	1	2	3	4	5
Employment & Training Programs	1	2	3	4	5
Skills Development Program	1	2	3	4	5

2. Do you think that any of the support programs listed in question 1 should be changed?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ No Opinion

If yes, which ones? How should the support(s) be changed?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Overall, how would you rate the variety of support programs that AHRE provides to low-income Albertans?

____Too Little ____ Too Much _____ Fine As Is ____No Opinion

How should supports be changed? What would be the advantage?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Do the programs and supports offered by AHRE reach people in need?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ No Opinion

If no, what else should be provided?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Do you feel that AHRE provides enough supports for low-income Albertans to meet their accommodation needs (e.g. rent, utilities, damage deposit)?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ No Opinion

If no, what else should be provided?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. Do you feel AHRE provides enough supports to low-income Albertans to meet their medical needs (e.g. prescription, optical and dental costs)?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ No Opinion

If no, what else should be provided?

_____

_____

_____

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_____

7. Do you feel AHRE provides enough supports to low-income parents to meet the costs of raising their children?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ No Opinion

If no, what else should be provided?

_____

_____

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_____

8. Do you feel AHRE provides enough supports to low-income Albertans to help them enter the workforce and remain employed?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ No Opinion

If no, what else should be provided?

_____

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9. Are there any other issues, concerns or solutions that AHRE needs to consider in providing programs and supports to low-income Albertans? Please be specific.

_____

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A. To assist us in the analysis of the questions, please indicate if you are completing this questionnaire on behalf of any of the following:

_____ Professional Association

_____ Non-Profit Organization

_____ Government

_____ Labour Group

_____ Employer or Business Organization

If you represent a professional association, non-profit organization, employer/business organization or labour group, please skip the remaining questions.

In order to better understand your responses and help the MLA Committee understand the issues and solutions, please complete the following questions. This information will be kept strictly confidential and used only for statistical analysis purposes.

B. What is your marital status?

_____ Married/Common-law

_____ Widow/Widower

_____ Separated/Divorced

_____ Single (never married)

C. How many dependent children do you support?

_____

D. How old are you?

_____ 25 years old or younger

_____ 55-64 years old

_____ 26-39 years old

_____ 65 years old or older

_____ 40-54 years old

E. Last year, what was your household income before taxes?

_____ $12,500 or less

_____ $30,001-$40,000

_____ $12,501-$17,500

_____ $40,001-$60,000

_____ $17,501-$21,750

_____ $60,001 or greater

_____ $21,751-$30,000

F. What is your main source of income?

_____

G. What is the highest education level that you have completed?

_____ Elementary School _____ College

_____ High School _____ University

Other (Please Specify) _____

If you would like to know the results of this review please provide your name and address and we will send you more information after the committee provides its final report to the Minister in the fall of 2001.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

_____

Please return your response by August 3, 2001.

Thank you for your comments.

For additional copies of this discussion guide, please call 310-4455. You can also visit the low-income review website at **www.gov.ab.ca/hre/lir/** to download or print the discussion guide.

WE'RE LISTENING

The MLA Committee to Review Low-Income Programs invites the comments of all Albertans on this review of Alberta Human Resources and Employment's programs for low-income Albertans.

You can use the envelope included with this discussion guide to send your response postage pre-paid.
Or **mail** your written submission to:

MLA Committee to Review Low-Income Programs
10808 99 Avenue
Edmonton AB T5K 0G5

E-mail your written submissions to:

LIR@gov.ab.ca

Fax your written submissions to:

(780) 415-9299
or, to connect toll-free, first dial 310-0000

Or **submit** your comments through the Low-Income Review web site at:

www.gov.ab.ca/hre/lir/

Please return your response by August 3, 2001.

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Alberta
HUMAN RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT
the people & workplace department